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Headline: New A*star-SMU centre combines high-powered computing and behavioural sciences to study people-centric issues

NEW A*STAR-SMU CENTRE COMBINES HIGH-POWERED COMPUTING AND BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES TO STUDY PEOPLE-CENTRIC ISSUES

The Centre for Technology and Social-Behavioural Insights (CTSBI) will tap on high performance computing technology, big data analytics and behavioural sciences to study people-centric issues and human behaviour including how people think, feel and act in different settings.

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Singapore, 18 June 2014 – The Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR) and the Singapore Management University (SMU) will establish a Centre for Technology and Social-Behavioural Insights (CTSBI) to tap on high performance computing technology, big data analytics and behavioural sciences to study people-centric issues and human behaviour including how people think, feel and act in different settings. Such information can be used to enhance planning and address issues in different areas such as retail, logistics, urban planning, education and community development.

About the Centre for Technology and Social-Behavioural Insights (CTSBI)

The new centre will conduct studies and develop technologies to better understand human behaviour such as relationships or interactions between consumers and businesses, employees and employers, or citizens and public service providers. These social and behavioural insights will be examined and applied in specific social and economic contexts to identify critical issues more accurately and propose more effective solutions.

The technologies and research findings could be useful in giving a more accurate and real time understanding of people's attitudes and behaviours such as consumer preferences and purchasing patterns to help improve businesses and customer experiences. For example, it would be possible to trawl millions of websites online to find out popular fashion trends or customers' affinity for certain designs, and analyse and filter this information in real-time to allow retailers to customise their marketing strategies accordingly. The Centre could also be used to study crowd movements to facilitate urban planning or feedback to enhance the delivery of public services.

The Centre leverages the advanced computational modelling and data analytics expertise of A*STAR's Institute of High Performance Computing (IHPC), the integrative information technology capabilities of A*STAR's Institute for Infocomm Research (I2R) and the in-depth scientific expertise on human behaviours of SMU's Behavioural Sciences Institute (BSI).

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The Centre, which will be officially operational from 1 July 2014, is funded by A*STAR's Joint Council Office (JCO), which supports R&D that brings together multidisciplinary capabilities. SMU will also contribute manpower and other research resources. The Centre will be helmed by two co-directors, Dr Victor Tong from A*STAR and Professor David Chan from SMU.

Dr Victor Tong, who is Director of the Social & Cognitive Computing Department at A*STAR's IHPC, said, "In today's connected world, everyone can express views and offer information about events in real time and at a rapid pace. This creates a large volume of dynamic data that is potentially very useful, but it is often difficult to figure out the critical ideas embedded in the data. One of the goals of our collaboration is to develop better ways to extract meaning and value from the large amounts of data collected from social software such as internet forums and blogs, and their related technologies. This can be effectively accomplished by bringing together the relevant top expertise in both social computing and behavioural sciences."

Professor David Chan, Lee Kuan Yew Fellow and Professor of Psychology and Director of SMU's BSI, said, "There has been increasing interest in academia, government and businesses to use big data and behavioural sciences to address important economic and social issues. Our approach in this new centre will combine the data-driven sense-making methods in social technologies with the hypothesis-driven approaches in behavioural sciences. To do this, we will integrate the diverse but complementary expertise from the institutes in A*STAR, SMU and other existing resources in Singapore. The research findings from this integrative approach will generate people-centric solutions that can better address critical issues in Singapore and elsewhere."

Professor Raj Thampuran, Managing Director of A*STAR, said, "This initiative will bring together information technology and social sciences to help businesses and other organisations gain deep insight of consumer sentiments. This will raise service delivery levels and is a competitive advantage for companies. "

Professor Arnoud De Meyer. President of SMU, said, "SMU is very glad with and fully committed to this research partnership with A*STAR. The CTSBI can make important positive differences to the Singapore economy and society. This partnership is an exemplar of bringing together complementary research capabilities, from not only different disciplines but also different institutes in Singapore, to address practical issues relevant to both business and societal needs."